

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0649

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: DEVELOPING CAMPAIGN ISSUES -- II

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION BANGKOK FROM CHIANG MAI JANUARY 11
REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 012

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: DEVELOPING CAMPAIGN ISSUES - II

1. SUMMARY - CANDIDATES IN NORTH REMAIN UNWILLING
TO DISCUSS ISSUES. THANOM RETURN HAS PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY
FOR ATTACK ON THOSE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH FORMER
REGIME, AND ECONOMIC MALADIES ALONG WITH CRIME PROBLEM
ARE BEING PAID LIP SERVICE, BUT CAMPAIGN REMAINS BASED ON
PERSONALITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE ISOLATED LOCAL ISSUES, AND THANOM'S
RETURN HAS HEATED UP THE CAMPAIGN DURING PAST WEEK, THERE
ARE STILL NO SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES BEING WIDELY DEBATED IN
THE NORTH. FOLLOWING RECENT RETURN OF THANOM, FORMER
UTPP CANDIDATES AND OTHERS LINKED TO PRIOR REGIME ARE BEING
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ATTACKED BY THEIR OPPONENTS WHO ARE GLEEFULLY REOPENING

OLD WOUNDS OF OCT '73 AND THE YEARS OF "REPRESSION" THAT PRECEDED THANOM'S OUSTER. THAI NATION CANDIDATE PRASIT CHUMPANIT'S PROBLEMS IN KAMPHAENG PHET HAVE ALREADY BEEN REPORTED. IN PHITSANULOK FORMER UTPP MAN AND CURRENT FRONT RUNNER SUCHON CHARMPUNOOT OF SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTY HAS FLOODED THE STREETS WITH AN IMPASSIONED LEAFLET DENYING THOSE ALLEGATIONS CALLING HIM A "STOOGES OF THE OUSTED TRIO" WHO IF ELECTED WOULD BRING THE TRIO BACK TO RULE THE COUNTRY. IF SUCH IS SUCHON'S INTENT, STATES THE LEAFLET, HE SHOULD BE "DOOMED TO DEATH AND TO HELL WITH NO CHANCE OF REINCARNATION." LEAFLET PICTURES SUCHON KNEELING BEFORE PHITSANULOK'S MOST FAMOUS BUDDHA IMAGE -- WITH APPROPRIATE CAPTIONS. SIMILAR ATTACKS AND DENIALS ARE REPORTED THROUGHOUT THE NORTH AS CANDIDATES LEAP TO ATTACK OR SCURRY FOR COVER.

3. NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED IN RURAL NORTH IS ISSUE OF FARMER GRIEVANCES. CONSIDERING THE NUMBER OF FARM VOTERS, THIS, IN FACT, IS LOGICAL CHOICE TO BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN, BUT IT IS NOT. CANDIDATES ALL PAY LIP SERVICE TO AN IMPROVED LIFE FOR THE FARMERS BUT ARE NOT FOCUSING ON THIS MATTER APPARENTLY BECAUSE THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT PARTY WHICH CAN BE BLAMED OR HELD RESPONSIBLE AND, QUITE FRANKLY, BECAUSE THERE ARE NO EASY SOLUTIONS TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. IN RECENT INTERVIEWS CARRIED IN THE CHIANG MAI PRESS ASKING POTENTIAL VOTERS TO NAME MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE, VAST MAJORITY SAID THE ECONOMY. MANY OF THOSE INTERVIEWED ALSO NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT NOBODY CAN CORRECT IT, SO WHY BOTHER TO VOTE.

4. IMPORTANT PROBLEM IN NORTH ONE WHICH HAS NOT BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE THUS FAR IS CRIME. CANDIDATES ALL DEPLORE DISTURBING CRIME STATISTICS, BUT NONE ARE REALLY EXPLOITING THE ISSUE BECAUSE, AGAIN, THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT PARTY AVAILABLE TO BLAME, AND CANDIDATES DON'T WANT TO OFFEND THE LOCAL POLICE WHO ARE A POWER TO BE RECKONED WITH IN ALL PROVINCES. (NOTABLE EXCEPTION TO MILD HANDLING OF PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS IN PHETCHABUN PROVINCE WHERE STUDENT ACTIVIST LEADER SOMBAT THAMRONGTHANYAWONG IS NOW STUMPING IN HIS

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HOME PROVINCE FOR THE LOCAL THAI PARTY CANDIDATE AND USING THIS FORUM TO ATTACK THE ENTIRE THAI POLITICAL SYSTEM AND IN PARTICULAR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WITH GOVERNOR SAKSIN SUKAJATI HEADING THE LIST.)

5. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN FINAL TWO WEEKS BEFORE ELECTIONS AS MORE PARTY LEADERS FROM BANGKOK MOVE OUT INTO THE HUSTINGS, SOME OF NATIONAL ISSUES WHICH HAVE THUS FAR

BEEN IGNORED IN THE NORTH WILL BE INJECTED INTO CAMPAIGN.
TO DATE, HOWEVER, CAMPAIGN CONTINUES TO BE BASED PRIMARILY
ON PERSONALITIES -- AND IT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN THAT
WAY. HARBIN UNQUOTE
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